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Our Republic, a Brotherhood.

A DISCOURSE

BY THE REV. A. D. BENEDICT.



# **Our Republic, a Brotherhood.**

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## **A DISCOURSE**

**DELIVERED IN ST. JOHN'S CHURCH, DELHI, N. Y.,**

**ON**

**THE NATIONAL FAST DAY, JAN. 4th, 1861,**

**BY**

**THE REV. A. D. BENEDIOT,**

**RECTOR OF THE CHURCH.**

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To those friends who have kindly deemed the following discourse worthy of a more extended notice than was furnished by its delivery on the day of our National Fast, and who indulge the hope that its words may do good in the present sad condition of our country, it is now affectionately inscribed by their friend and Pastor,

THE AUTHOR.



## DISCOURSE.

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"God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble."

Ps. 46, 1.

"Ye are brethren! Why do ye wrong one to another?"—Acts 7, 26.

A little more than eleven years since, the proclamation of our chief Executive called us to the observance of a national fast. Then, ravaging pestilence was filling our fair land with desolation and mourning. God seemed to be rebuking our nation in His wrath, and chastening us in His sore displeasure. From North to South, from the Ocean to our westward wall of mountains, there was one common cry of lamentation over the realized or prospective visitation of a terrific disease. Trouble and consternation sat upon every countenance. We were fellow sufferers under a common calamity.

But now, another and entirely different trouble has caused the President to designate this as a day of fasting, humiliation and prayer. Hardly have the last of our Revolutionary heroes been laid in their graves, ere that highly prized boon of peace and national independence, so arduously struggled for, so dearly won, is endangered. Not by foes abroad, (for then we could bear it,) but by those worse

and more fearful enemies, dissension and distrust and hostility within. The house is divided against itself. The eye is saying to the hand, "I have no need of thee," and again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." The members of the body are forgetting their necessary dependence upon each other. There is too much indifference to the preservation of that political form, into which the God of nations and of battles has breathed a healthy national life, and by which we have grown into a vigorous and prosperous manhood. Mutual confidence is destroyed. We cannot disguise the fact that it is indeed a time of trouble. Intercourse between the great North and the great South of our vast country is almost suspended; monetary affairs are deranged; commerce and trade have received a paralyzing shock; thousands are thrown out of employment; not a nook and corner of our land but feels the breaking up of that confidence which has heretofore cemented the Confederate States of our Union.

Now, it is not my design, or my duty, to take the stand of the statesman, or of the political partizan, and unfold the cause or causes of the dangers which threaten our peace and safety, to point out a remedy for our evils in special Congressional measures, to say what should be conceded on the part of the North or the South, in order to prevent the bursting of that dark cloud which overspreads our political sky. Enough that we are in trouble; that men's hearts are "failing them for fear." Enough that human wisdom is powerless in this terrible exigency of our country's existence. As an ambassador for the Most High, it is my duty to direct you all, irrespective of your political preferences or opinions, to a God that judgeth the earth, to humble yourselves before Him against whom we *all* have sinned, and to beseech Him that He "turn away from His fierce anger that we perish not." I can speak as one who loves the Union, and who is sensible that the brightness of our civil heritage depends upon its preserva-

tion. That extreme view, that our Republic may as well be dismembered and smitten into fragments, has none of my sympathy. They, who *profess* indifference, or who, under the heat of misguided and intemperate zeal, would *hasten* such an issue, know not what they do. Our great danger is, lest the crumbling process, precipitately commenced, be allowed to continue without concern or care for the ultimate disastrous results: lest passion hold the sceptre over reason and judgment: lest upon either side there be such a willingness to let the conflagration take its course, that after regret and repentance will be without avail. I cannot yet bring my own mind to the conclusion that any initiatory steps, which have already been taken, are to result in a final and inevitable separation. Still our position is a perilous one. I humbly trust that God in His wise Providence may avert such a dire calamity—the turmoil and sore dissensions and probable bloodshed which would be the certain result. And therefore I rejoice that from the highest office in our land there has issued such a call as has brought us from our homes to-day, a summons to humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God, to beseech Him to “punish us not according to our sins, nor reward us according to our iniquities.”

Our hope is truly in Jehovah. He only can harmonize the antagonistic elements and forces which are now working in the problem of our country's history. He only can overrule and speak peace to our troubled political sea. May there be one general turning to Him for relief: may the incense from thousands and tens of thousands of altars throughout our land this day be so acceptable in His sight, that He may stay deserved chastisements and continue to us the blessings of peace and prosperity.

Were He now to speak to us from the cloud of His majestic presence, would there not be brought to our ears an earnest and compassionate appeal like that of Moses to his contending countrymen, viz: “Ye are brethren! why do

ye wrong one to another?" It is worth the while for us to go back to first principles, and ask what we are, what we ought to expect of ourselves, what a gazing world ought to see now manifested in our conduct as American citizens, as patriots, and as Christians, at the present crisis. We *are* brethren. Not merely because we belong to the great brotherhood of a common humanity, but because we are to a great extent of the same race. The current of Anglo-Saxon blood predominates. England is our mother. We all speak the same language. In our laws, our social habits, our literature, our educational establishments, and many other respects we shew the same family likeness. Despite all the differences that may be alleged, we are all as branches of the same vine. States that have been added to the original thirteen, have sought admission on the ground of a common congeniality of feeling and interest, they have asked our nurture and care because of their filial relationship, they have not in a single instance been exotics, but as our own indigenous plants, as offshoots from our body politic. Our own sons and daughters have gone out and increased and asked to be acknowledged legitimate and worthy members of our political family. Besides all this, we are bound together by other ties of affiliation. Who has not near or distant relatives in one or more of the disaffected States, those bearing our own name and family features, those whose interests and duties and attachments bind them to remain, perhaps to spend their lives with those who look upon that vexing subject of contention with far different eyes from our own? These ties between the members of scattered families throughout our Union draw the States together. Georgia and Louisiana are not as far from us seemingly as Canada. They have as States a family and filial interest, because of our love for certain of their acknowledged citizens. Our hearts are there. We deprecate civil conflict as truly the warring of brother with brother.

Yet farther. We are brethren politically. Side by side we struggled for a distinct existence and nationality. Diverse local interests at the first made the drawing of a common instrument of adoption no easy task for our forefathers. What deserved blessings have been poured upon the heads of those patriot heroes, who so patiently and self-sacrificingly labored to cement the different parts of our Union in one common whole! *One* in independence, *one* in feeling the necessity of severance from the mother country, they were *not* one in other respects. The representatives from the several Colonies did not *look* alike, or *feel* alike. One had one interest, and another another which must be respected under a National confederation. It was no slight work to draft satisfactory articles of compromise, to make such a Union as Providence has since smiled upon in mercy and loving kindness. Yet slavery was recognized. None, because of its existence, can deny that God has blessed us as a whole. Where have any people been so signally favored of Heaven since the peace of 1783? Where have there been better secured to the citizen the blessings of wise and equitable laws? Indeed, what country can now boast of such a general care for the masses, of such a bright sun of civilization and general enlightenment as shines in our political horizon? What then is the legitimate and worthy conclusion to be drawn from our previous national prosperity? Why, surely, that that adopted family on which Heaven has so auspiciously smiled, that confederation which was formed by concession and compromise, may in like manner be maintained and preserved. The spirit that reigned in the breasts of the patriot sages of the Revolution, should still reign in our National councils and our individual hearts. If our experiment of living as a family under one common parental roof had been productive of *no* success; if domestic quarrels and disasters of various kinds had continually attended our effort to be a united people, then it might be questioned.



whether we ought to have entered into such a compact. But, instead of this, we have been united, so that the common body has a consolidated individual strength above any aggregate which the Colonies as separate existences could possibly have attained. Union has made our country what it is. God has blessed us beyond what the wisest seers of the Revolution would have ventured to predict. He has lifted our confederate nation to a lofty and honored position. We are now holding the balance of power in our own hands, far more than the governments of the old world would be willing to acknowledge. Our voice is respected, our power feared. Not a country *any* where but is glad of our friendship, not one that would not deprecate our wrath. Our flag is sacred on the seas. The stars and stripes forbid aggression from the spoiler. We have, in a word, a national name and a national power which God, the Ruler of nations, has given us. Shall we, in a moment of madness, dash our cup of blessings to the earth? Shall the physician *kill* his patient, in his efforts to cure him? Shall we by our pride and obstinacy reduce ourselves to such an insignificant position, that every petty kingdom of the world can point at us in scorn, and write upon our monumental stone, viz: "Her glory is departed?"

In other respects also, we are brethren. Nature and art bind us together with their strongest ties. The mighty river that empties into the Gulf stretches out upon each side her many branches, clasping at least two-thirds of the Confederate States in her embrace, forbidding the idea, that the free use of her waters should be the subject of treaties, or the cause of hostile contention. And then, what a vast net work of internal improvements is as the veins and arteries of our body politic, furnishing easy and rapid communication for the traveller, cultivating habits of unrestrained intercourse, inviting a constant interchange of products and manufactures, making us, in a word, mutually dependent, proving most conclusively, that we inherit the

same common life, that we ought to regard each other as brethren.

The question, whether the North or the South could stand the better alone, is a minor matter, when there rises up before us the grave and momentous duty of preserving the Union entire. Our work is to keep the ship from foundering; whether in case of wreck, the prow or the stern will sooner be submerged, is of little consequence at the present crisis. The signs of the times already show that terrible loss and disaster will scourge both portions of the country, when the ties that bind us, shall have been finally severed. Each is necessary to the other. We have made ourselves mutually dependent. We have lived too long in friendly counsel to cast each other off at the last as worthless appendages, to try to treat the other as strangers, much less as deadly enemies.

So also, in Ecclesiastical relations, we must regard the South as brethren. The Protestant Episcopal Church, amid the wildest strifes of party excitement, has ever refrained from that perplexing theme of dispute which has rent other religious bodies in sunder. She has firmly withstood the most urgent pressure from without to pronounce blessings upon one set of political opinions, and pour forth curses on another. Her voice has ever been for peace. Brethren from the South and North have met together, and consulted for the interests of Christ's kingdom, each loving the other for the one ruling desire to do good to all men, believing that the bond as well as the free may all be one in Christ Jesus. Hence, we have maintained a great conservative influence in the land. As those who take no party attitude, we labor for peace. We deprecate division. We pray in our every Litany, to be delivered "from all sedition, privy conspiracy, and rebellion." We feel that our American branch of the Church has a great and glorious work for our vast country, and for a fallen world generally, to accomplish. Separation and dismem-

berment would be a sad and rude shock to those grand Missionary enterprises, which unitedly, in faith and prayer have been so auspiciously inaugurated and are now so zealously prosecuted. Far be the day, when for the last time in General Convention we meet as brethren for fraternal counsel and legislation, when the formation of another confederacy and the bitterness of popular feeling in consequence of civil division, force upon us the necessity of another and separate branch of the Church of Christ. It is hard to believe that this can ever be. With one mind and one spirit we have labored together, knowing no North or South, in our zeal for preaching a spiritual liberty to *all* the captive bound souls of sin and Satan. We would still labor together—hand in hand proclaiming the same blessed Gospel,—praying for the same President and Congress—beseeching the Most High to pour out upon us the spirit of “unity, peace, and concord.”

Since then we are thus manifestly brethren, the question arises, “Why do ye wrong one to another?” No domestic difficulty has not its two sides of complaint. Each is likely to accuse the other as the aggressor and the more culpable. The particular causes of complaint on either part of the two hostile sections of our unhappy land, I seek not to unfold. On each side, charges of wrong doing, unfaithfulness, and indifference to the other’s rights are abundant. We must all bear witness to the truth, that what has been held right in principle has not always been prosecuted with a right temper and spirit. Language, from the press and even from the pulpit, has been often employed, directly *adapted* not only, but *intended* to wound and exasperate. There has been too much of the enemy; too little of the friend. Too much overbearance; too little forbearance. Too much anger, and animosity, and uncharitableness; too little of that kindness and forgiveness for those in the wrong, which becometh the Gospel of Christ.

Brethren have drawn the sword, when they ought to



have waved the olive branch. They have sought to call down fire from heaven, even under the gentle rebuke of their Divine Master, viz: "Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of." They have not been patient with evil in others, as the Most High has been patient with the evil in themselves. Because they have discovered spots in the sun, they have striven in their zeal to wrench it at once from its place in the heavens. They have not followed the Apostle's advice to "love as brethren, forbearing one another and forgiving one another in love," but have the rather, been too willing to say and do that, which would irritate and provoke. Hence as a consequence, the house is divided. Brothers and sisters are arraying themselves in hostility. We hear *enough* of contention, too *little* of peace and reconciliation. Ah! we are *both* in the wrong. The spirit of brethren would *never* have brought us to such a lamentable crisis. Who is not ashamed of the humiliating spectacle of a great and powerful nation, thus lifting the suicidal weapon for its own destruction!!

What, in such a state of things, is our hope? The cloud grows darker and darker. The gathering tempest seems just ready to burst upon our heads. "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble." When the wisdom of man fails, then we should the more urgently realize our dependence upon Him whose Providence governs the world. He can even now overrule our country's troubles, bring order out of confusion, and save us from the disastrous results of dismemberment. It is true that we *deserve* such a chastisement as a nation. We have forgotten God in our prosperity. Our blessings have swollen our hearts with pride and wantonness. We have provoked the Most High to cast us off forever. Still we turn to Him in this our hour of trouble. May there be such a general casting of our cares and anxieties upon Him, that He may "turn away from His fierce anger that we perish not." Even Nineveh was saved, in consequence of a general hu-

miliation, and fasting, and prayer. The cloud of judgment did not burst. The bolts of Heaven did not descend. A Nation humbly prostrate before God to-day would be our salvation. Possibly, the earnest intercession of the fifty or even *ten* righteous; of humble bands of Christian men and women here and there throughout our land, may induce the Almighty to recall the winds, and speak peace to our troubled waters. Let us then pray in faith, and humility, and perseverance. That if it is His will, we may be saved: but if not, that we may receive a salutary lesson from His calamitous visitations; that we may know and feel that it is not without a wise and important end, that mournful dismemberment is suffered to crush our once happy land in sorrow to the dust. For, most important as are now our political interests; anxious as every one of us must be with regard to the revelations of the very few weeks that lie immediately before us; intent as we *all* are upon the solution of the Problem, whether we are to be united or broken up into two or more confederacies, or indeed, whether there are to be as many separate governments to dot our fair land as there are States in the Union; full of absorbing concern as is this whole matter, for ourselves and future generations; still, it is for our happiness and consolation, that, as Christians, we can rest implicitly in Him Who holds the sceptre over all the nations and sovereignties of earth. He can bring good out of evil. He can and will order all things for the ultimate good of His people. Let us, then, now and ever, make Him "OUR REFUGE AND STRENGTH, OUR VERY PRESENT HELP IN TROUBLE."









